



القمة الثقافية
أبوظبي
Culture Summit
Abu Dhabi

دائرة الثقافة والسياحة
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE
AND TOURISM



Press release

Culture Summit Abu Dhabi 2021 concludes fourth edition

Culture Summit Abu Dhabi 2021 called for increased international collaboration, sustainable investment in the culture sector and a new value proposition for culture on the public agenda

17 March 2021, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: Culture Summit 2021, organised by the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), concluded its fourth Summit on Wednesday 10 March, in its first virtual edition. The three-day programme saw participation of over 100 global experts from fields of culture, creative industries, media, public policy, and technology.

Under the theme of ***The Cultural Economy and the Economy of Culture***, the Summit explored the topics of community and responsibility, diversity and pluralism in cultural expression, digitalization of cultural content and equitable access, an increased focus on engaging local communities, and transversal cross-government policy approaches. Participants discussed ***post-COVID sector recovery and transformation***, envisioning a new system that is more resilient and adaptable to ongoing crises. It also shone a light on the ***International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development 2021***, with the aim to showcase how the creative economy can advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals in education, economy, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequality, and sustainable cities and communities.

HE Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, said: “This year’s Culture Summit brought together global leaders to consider key issues facing the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI), with an ambition to find new ways of working. It is clear that we must enhance the framework for international collaborations to strengthen the cultural ecosystem’s connectivity and uphold support for its people. We must ensure investment for the industry, making that a top priority on every policy and decision makers’ agenda, by showing how these sectors can contribute to sustainable economic and social growth.

Culture Summit 2021 asked participants to contemplate the turn in how priorities as cultural practitioners and institutions have shifted and changed, towards a deeper understanding of their critical role in post-Covid recovery and renewal. We look forward to continuing these critical conversations over the course of the coming year, as we are committed in moving onwards with the Summit outcomes and to meet again in 2022.”

During the closing panel of Culture Summit 2021, **HE Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi**, added: “These three days at Culture

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Summit Abu Dhabi have been imperative to cementing our overall combined cultural strategy. We have truly created an intellectual cohesion between key members from the worlds of culture and policy. At next year's Summit, we will be talking about the initiatives that have taken place throughout the year to make sure we are safeguarding this cultural ecosystem. It is critical, that the discussions held over the past three days continue, not just for next year, but for the next 20, 30 years and beyond."

During the Summit, DCT Abu Dhabi in collaboration with UNESCO, announced a joint study which will assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural and creative industries globally.

All sessions from Culture Summit are available online via the website and YouTube channel.

The Summit's programme saw participants present panel discussions, case studies, keynotes, artist talks, and performances, developed in collaboration with international partners, including UNESCO, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation, The Economist Events, Google, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Design Museum, London.

Other 2021 participations included Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation, Berklee Abu Dhabi, Image Nation, twofour54, Abu Dhabi Film Commission, Institut Français, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, Arab Fund for Arts & Culture, and the World Bank.

For more information, full programme, and to watch sessions back, please visit www.culturesummitabudhabi.com

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Key takeaways from the Summit included:

Discussions focused on the importance of community and collaborative work in the cultural economy and methods to enhance cooperation:

- *The cultural recovery is an anthropological necessity, but it is also an economic necessity, for the creative economy generates trillions of dollars every year, and its impact and influence is often underestimated. It is also a necessity for peace, because culture brings people together closer, by building bridges and by creating meaning. **Audrey Azoulay, Director General, UNESCO***
- *Two critical shifts seem to be emerging. One, the need for active empathy and outreach around the local communities, our public. A redefinition of what our public is actually constituted of, maybe not only in person, but maybe the digital shift as well, but local, empathy, seem to be the ideas that have to shape our practice going forward. And two, the need for flatter, more collective methods of working together [...] both within the institution and within our constituencies, of course including artists. **Alexandra Munroe - Senior Curator and Director, Curatorial Affairs, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi***
- *Fundamentally, our ideas around what community is, have to evolve as well. It's not just about people that are; or the rights of people, that are on the earth at the moment. We really need to find strategies and mechanisms to accommodate the rights of future generations. **Matteo Mastrandrea, associate designer, and researcher at Es Devlin Studio***
- *The health crisis [of the COVID-19 pandemic] has shown us how essential creativity is for our well-being and to our survival. **Toussaint Tiendrebeogo, Chief of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions Entity and Secretary of the 2005 Convention, UNESCO***

The role the CCI can play for urban recovery and resilience:

- *Before working for the government, I was involved in several humanitarian projects here in Asia and one important lesson that I learned in dealing with recovery from disasters is that resilience resides with the community, it's an innate quality embedded in the social fabric of the society. **Hilmar Farid, Director General of Culture, Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia***
- *Culture should be acknowledged as the foundation that integrates people-centered and place-based policies [...] Culture has not all the time been explicitly considered at the heart of the reconstruction and recovery process, and even if we say that we will consider cultural aspects, we find that consultation is not taking place properly at a community level, no kind of stakeholder analysis, no proper voicing of different segments of the*

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*community. [...] respecting all identities and voicing, their voice in the process is very important. **Ahmed Eiweida, Global Coordinator for Cultural Heritage & Sustainable Tourism, World Bank***

Panellists discussed the local vs the global within the cultural ecosystem:

- *We have heard extensively during these few days, about the relevance of reinforcing our connection with our communities. We cannot stress enough the vital importance that it has to make sure we do not become, as institutions, kind of bell jar institutions which live in a rarefied or insulated context [...] It's important that our routes as institutions are firmly grounded in the place and the time where we belong. Having said that, I also think we should avoid the risk of equating local with parochial, of treating local audiences' expectations as being no less ambitious than that of the international public. **Juan Ignacio Vidarte, Deputy Director & Chief Officer for Global Strategies, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Director General, Guggenheim Bilbao***
- *We were discussing before about biennials during COVID, or post-COVID, and how a lot of international curators or visitors would always think; or the criticism would always be, how can you have a biennial when you cannot travel? But what about the people who are in the city? The biennial really, in the new model of biennials, is catering to the local population. **Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, President and Director, Sharjah Art Foundation***

The vital role of language and vernacular:

- *In terms of this new, or refreshed vernaculars or vocabularies of the local, I think this is a moment in which we can really refresh them, so that when we meet again, the spaces that we create are exciting again. I think it's normal to feel like we're always doing or saying the same thing over and over again, so I think the pandemic, as devastating as it has been, it's also an opportunity to rethink the ways that we've been working before, and to open up new avenues and possibilities. **Gabi Ngcobo, Curator and educator, head of the 2018 Berlin Biennale***

Diversity, pluralism, and equity:

- *There is an opportunity now to identify and address the structural barriers that are preventing prosperous, and equitable creative ecosystems. **Marisa Henderson, Chief, Creative Economy and Development Section, UNCTAD***
- *The pandemic has showed us that the culture is very fragile, and artists and cultural professionals were tremendously exposed since precarious self-employment has become the standard model. COVID has had a drastic effect on culture sector – people in low-income culture jobs have become even more financially vulnerable. **Dea Vidović, Director of Kultura Nova Foundation***

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- *[...] In a time where our societies are becoming increasingly divided, polarized, fractured and distant from each other – and not just because of Covid-19, but because of our political rhetoric and atmosphere – we need art more than ever to help create those bridges of understanding, and empathy, and connection with each other, and reminding us what we have in common. [...] I would like to see a diversity of voices that is something that is strengthened and supported in a way that it was not pre-Covid-19. **Deeyah Khan, two-time Emmy Award-winning and twice BAFTA-nominated documentary film director***

The role of architecture and the responsibility of architecture was also addressed:

- The challenge for architects is, the thing which drives us most is making beautiful spaces; making the staircase, making the beautiful concrete wall that sits in the water or the window from which you can see the skyline, this is our physical craft, this is what gets us up in the morning, this is what we love to work with. But at the same time this stuff has to be towards a purpose and that purpose is, ideally, collective and social, so therefore it has to play a role in this community and at the same time, increasingly, we have to be very considerate of environmental consequence. We have this triangle of responsibility, which is, community, environment, and the physical. We can't leave any of these out anymore. **Sir David Chipperfield, principal, and founder of David Chipperfield Architects**

With an ever-increasing focus on digitisation and accessibility, discussion points included:

- *If there is one thing I would like to see in the next 12 months it's a real change in organizing the power of creative people to get their just rewards in the online world. That seems hopeless at the moment, but it's not hopeless because it has been achieved in other areas, and there's lots of really innovative thinking going on in that space at the moment. We need to pull that together, and really give it some clout in the next 12 months. If we're ever going to do it, now's the time to do it. **John Newbigin, Chair, Counterculture***
- *When you see that 48% of the population in the world has no access to internet or [digital] platforms, we are obliged to change the way that we are doing things. It is great to have instruments of digital means, to do the digitisation that many museums and other cultural centres are doing, but we have to ensure that we will continue to give all the effort to have these two roads open – the virtual and the physical. **Ernesto Ottone Ramirez – Assistant-Director for Culture, UNESCO***

On how the cultural landscape has been transformed by dramatically reduced investment in the cultural sector, and cultural recovery caused by Covid, it was noted:

- *It is imperative that within future budget cycles, there are stimulus packages that specifically focus on the cultural ecosystem and CCI. If it is not happening, then we need*

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*to collectively come together with the help of UNESCO and some of the larger, more international institutions, to make that front and centre in the mindset of any city's or country's financial budget cycle. **H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi***

- *I think that we are at a crossroad, and I think that we have a decision to make. A pandemic creates a portal that we go through, and do we want to return to a normality or do we want to make change happen? And art and culture is always about innovation. I think that we're at a moment where we are learning new ways of communicating with one another. There is a more democratic flatness in some ways, in terms of how we collaborate. **Vicky Featherstone, Artistic Director, Royal Court Theatre***
- *Many artists have found it an opportunity [the pandemic] to get off the treadmill of the constant promo of the artworld and just focus on being creative, going back to the studio and working on their work. [...] We are going to see the fruits of this in the next two or three years on an unbelievable scale which we not only need to celebrate but we must take our kids to because it's going to be their engagement which is going to prove to future generations that people don't just enjoy culture, they need culture. Culture is what makes humans, human. **Fiammetta Rocco, Culture correspondent, The Economist***
- *Perhaps what has felt like the end of the world, is the beginning of a new one. The health pandemic has witnessed joint efforts by governments, civil society, the private sector and international organisations to underline the importance of the creative economy as a solution for the global recovery. Impact investment can and will play a critical role in this journey. **Marisa Henderson, Chief, Creative Economy and Development Section, UNCTAD***
- *We have to fight to ensure that policy makers, authorities, governments and Ministers of Culture, like Abu Dhabi is doing, can make sure that all the knowledge and all the good practices that they have put in place can be shared. **Ernesto Ottone Ramirez – Assistant-Director for Culture, UNESCO***
- *I do think that evolution [of the museum sector] isn't a return to normalcy, I think it will evolve into aspects of the past and that communal desire to come together in physical spaces, that still is at the heart of cultural institutions, with this mixed model of scale, of global and local. I think there is a very potentially healthy melting pot, but I just reiterate that I'm not shying away from the catastrophe that's going to hit certain aspects of the cultural economy -we need to face up to that. **Tim Marlow, Chief Executive and Director, The Design Museum, London***

– ENDS –

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Notes to Editors:

Culture Summit 2021 sessions playback is available via the website,

www.culturesummitabudhabi.com

Dedicated Summit hashtag #CultureSummitAD2021.

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About Culture Summit Abu Dhabi:

Culture Summit is a forum that convenes leaders from the fields of the arts, design, heritage, media, museums, public policy, and technology, to identify ways in which culture can transform societies and communities worldwide.

The 2021 edition will mark the fourth and first virtual edition of the Summit that will be taking place from 8 – 10 March 2021, exploring the theme of The Cultural Economy and the Economy of Culture.

Inspired by key discussions from the 2019 edition of the Summit on the financial support and sustainability in the culture sector in the face of rapid societal and economic change, Culture Summit 2021 will examine opportunities to renew the cultural and creative industries in a post-COVID19 environment and explore how the creative economy can be a positive force for societies and economies.

Culture Summit 2021 is organised by the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi, in collaboration with global partner organisations including, UNESCO, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation, the Economist Events, Google, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Design Museum London, Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation, Louvre Abu Dhabi and Berklee Abu Dhabi.

A series of panels, performances, and case studies throughout the event will engage participants with ideas about the role of culture in improving our world. The 2021 edition of the Culture Summit is open for the public.

About the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi:

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The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) drives the sustainable growth of Abu Dhabi's culture and tourism sectors, fuels economic progress and helps achieve Abu Dhabi's wider global ambitions. By working in partnership with the organisations that define the Emirate's position as a leading international destination, DCT Abu Dhabi strives to unite the ecosystem around a shared vision of the Emirate's potential, coordinate effort and investment, deliver innovative solutions, and use the best tools, policies, and systems to support the culture and tourism industries.

DCT Abu Dhabi's vision is defined by the Emirate's people, heritage, and landscape. We work to enhance Abu Dhabi's status as a place of authenticity, innovation, and unparalleled experiences, represented by its living traditions of hospitality, pioneering initiatives, and creative thought.

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